LOS ANGELES PACIFIC UNIVERSITY | Azusa Pacific University System

Bachelor of Arts in Applied Psychology (BAAP) Program Review:
Executive Summary 2020

Process

The Bachelors of Arts in Applied Psychology (BAAP) program has been offered at Los Angeles Pacific University (LAPU), formerly known as Azusa Pacific University, University College (UC), since 2012. The BAAP program was developed in response to the popularity and growth of psychology programs nationwide.

A Program Review Committee (PRC) composed of academic administrators, full-time faculty, and adjunct faculty began in August 2019 to conduct a comprehensive program review. Following guidelines provided by the WASC Senior Colleges and Universities Commission (WSCUC), the program review examined program quality and program viability and sustainability.

The PRC's review of the BAAP program was based on analyses of student enrollment information; program purpose and design; annual learning results for the program; similar programs offered by competitors; student retention, completion, and graduation rates; student survey results; faculty information and feedback; market trends; and institutional resource allocated to the program.

Once the PRC completed an initial review of the program, external reviewers were invited to conduct their own review of the program and provide additional feedback which was summarized in the External Review Report. The outcome of this process was then synthesized in a 27-page BAAP Program Review 2019-2020 Report. The summary findings and recommendations are presented below.

Findings

- Overall, the BAAP courses are generally aligned with the BAAP program, institutional outcomes, and WSCUC standards. However, a careful and detailed review has shown revision of some course curricula may be prudent for both 300- and 400-level courses. Specifically, APSY 300, APSY 320, and APSY 490 need increased alignment with PLO 5 to best meet the introduced level of expectation. For APSY 325, increased development of coursework emphasizing PLO 4 would be beneficial to best meet the demonstrated level expectation. In APSY 410, additional coursework and emphasis on PLO 1 would be beneficial to bring this to the demonstrated level of expectation. APSY 350 would benefit from additional emphasis and coursework on PLO 2 at the introduced level. While APSY 490B does target opportunities for students to demonstrate PLO 5, it has been determined that it would be beneficial to incorporate review or discussion content in APSY 490A, the immediately preceding pre-requisite course, to help students prepare for effective demonstration of cultural competence during APSY 490B.

- PLO 3 should also be considered for review. It is very broad in nature and previous assessment team members have noted that it is difficult to assess for this very reason.

- BAAP courses APSY 105, APSY 285, APSY 295, APSY 300, APSY 315, APSY 330, APSY 335, APSY 405, APSY 430, APSY 490 A & B, and APSY 495 have undergone major revisions since they were first launched. BAAP courses APSY 410, APSY 445, APSY 470, and APSY 480 have undergone moderate revisions since they were first launched.

- The PRC discussed utilizing more diverse modalities for classroom engagement such as the inclusion of video posting in the discussion forums or increased emphasis of deliverables other than written assignments (more inclusion of presentation, voice-over PowerPoint, etc.). This could increase student engagement and retention, as well as degree completion long-term.

- Data from the "End of Course Student Feedback Survey," gathered over a 4-year span, makes it evident students have experienced curriculum/instruction consistent with the university's core commitment to Faith Integration. The average response to the two faith related statements included in the survey were 4.1 and 4.3 respectively. These averages clearly indicate that students both see and experience the intentionality of the faith integrated focus within the BAAP curriculum.

- The 2015 Annual Learning Results Report for the BAAP program assessment for PLO 1: Demonstrate the ability to integrate principles of psychology and Christian faith failed to meet the satisfactory level when it was assessed with APSY 475 Ethics Issues course. However, a conclusion drawn by the review team was that it was the lack of clarity in the instructions as to expectations rather than a lack of emphasis in the class at large. This conclusion was further supported by the high ratings given by students in response to survey questions/statements ranging from 4.17-4.83 in evaluations of APSY 475 spanning the years 2015-2019.

- The BAAP program formally launched in Spring 2, 2012 and steadily climbed to a high of 396 students in the Summer of 2018. Over 350 students have been steadily enrolled each term since. Diversifying the courses and/or concentrations available to increase specialties students can take advantage of would also help the BAAP to meet growing market demands and improve the enrollment and retention rates (e.g., trauma, veterans issues, Applied Behavior Analysis).

- The retention rate for BAAP students, measured as those enrolled in the same semester one year later, has averaged approximately 68% since the inception of the program. Over the last academic year, which includes the full data for 2018, the retention rate has been 69%. The retention rate is lower than the average rate at LAPU, which is 79%. Currently, it is difficult to determine whether they may have transferred to another institution, or what other reasons were for these students to discontinue their studies. And so, reasons students did not finish their degrees at LAPU are unclear. Some contributing factors may include: an absence of motivation to finish a program due to a career change; inadequate coach-student engagement; and family or personal issues. Offering more consistent instructors and specific expectations, as well as increasing student engagement may improve retention of the BAAP program. Finally, one study at a sister institution (Grand Canyon University) indicated that there were measurable advantages for students taught by full time faculty in online programs related to students outcome variables including: successful course completion rates, decreased failure and withdrawal rates, increased course grades, and increased continued enrollment (Mueller, 2013). "Complementing results of the learning and performance variables, those students being taught by a full-time online faculty member were more satisfied with their online learning experience" (Mueller et al., 2013, para. 23).

Moreover, other factors to consider are the status of students (whether they are part-time or full-time) and their sense of belonging and connection to the university (Johnson, 2008; Lee and Choi, 2011). Assessing the status of faculty, students (i.e., their season of life, level of motivation, their academic experience, and so forth) and ways to promote a sense of belonging and connection are all central to how LAPU can think about retention in the future.

Outcomes

The BAAP program has grown substantially from 2012 to 2020, with 11 concentrations and 154 students (20%) have graduated. Of the 574 students who have not completed the program, 234 (40%) have been enrolled in 2019-2020 and, therefore, are continuing students. This means 341 students (60%) have discontinued their studies with LAPU. Among the 341 discontinued students, 5 students earned over 100 local credit hours at LAPU.

Overall, BAAP courses are generally aligned with the BAAP program with regard to Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) and Course Learning Objectives (CLOs), institutional outcomes, and WSCUC standards. However, a careful and detailed review has shown that revision of some courses' curricula may be prudent for both 300- and 400-level courses. Specifically, APSY 300, APSY 490A, and APSY 320 need increased alignment with PLO 5 to best meet the introduced level of expectation. For APSY 325, increased development of coursework emphasizing PLO 4 would be beneficial to best meet the demonstrated level expectation. In APSY 410, additional coursework and emphasis on PLO 1 would be beneficial to bring this to the demonstrated level of expectation. APSY 350 would benefit from additional emphasis and coursework on PLO 2 at the introduced level. While APSY 490B does target opportunities for students to demonstrate PLO 5, it has been determined that it would be beneficial to incorporate review or discussion content in APSY 490A, the immediately preceding pre-requisite course, to help students prepare for effective demonstration of cultural competence during APSY 490B. Finally, in general, PLO 3 should also be considered for review. It is very broad in nature and previous assessment team members have noted that it is difficult to assess for this reason.

Students reported via Student Feedback Surveys from 2013 to 2019 that on average they are spending 14.7 hours per week in learning activities related to their BAAP courses. This is consistent with LAPU's *Credit Hour Policy.*

The LAPU BAAP program is very competitive when compared to universities across the country offering online psychology degrees. The BAAP program is in the middle/moderate position on cost per credit. It offers areas of emphasis the same or comparable to GCU, Brandam, Liberty and SNHU. The universities compared include four Christian and two secular institutions of higher learning.

Some consideration might be given to expanding areas of emphasis to include: 1) Addiction/recovery, 2) Gerontology, 3) Forensic, and 4) Applied Behavioral Analysis, all of which are growing areas of both need and student interest.

With respect to student learning and success in the history of the BAAP program, three years worth of PLO assessment (2015, 2016-2017, and 2018) has been collected, with mixed results. Students achieved PLOs 2, 3, and 5 at the expected levels, but failed to achieve PLOs 1, 4, and 6 at the expected levels. PLOs 2 and 6 are scheduled for assessment in the current assessment cycle. As noted in the BAAP Learning Results documents (2015, 2016-2017 and 2018), the sample sizes for PLO 6 were small, which may have affected the result.

To a large extent the BAAP program goals are being achieved, based on the fact that approximately 30% of students graduate within 4 years of enrollment with a BAAP degree. However, the graduation rate is lower compared to the overall LAPU Bachelor's degree graduation rate of approximately 46%. The retention rate for BAAP students, measured as those enrolled in the same semester one year later, has averaged approximately 68% since the inception of the program. Over the last academic year for which full data are available (2018) the retention rate has been 69%, which is lower than the average rate at LAPU of 79%. Currently, it is difficult to determine whether they may have transferred to another institution, or what other reasons were for these students to discontinue their studies. And so, the reasons that the students did not finish their degrees at LAPU are unclear. Some contributing factors may include an absence of motivation to finish a program due to a career change, inadequate coach-student engagement, and family or personal issues.

Currently, there is a market demand for psychology graduates with a need for a diverse set of tracks or paths. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "employment of psychologists is projected to grow 14 percent from 2018 to 2028, much faster than the average for all occupations" (2020, para. 6). Please see here for additional data. There are sufficient faculty to support the growth and quality of this program as well as an increased diversification of courses and tracts. The faculty range in specialities and experience, with strong clinical and research-based backgrounds and many years of teaching experience. These faculty are supported directly with an Assistant Dean, while the students are directly supported with success coaches. Students are supported with a New Learner Orientation course, and then supported by weekly interactions with their success coach, supporting the whole person at LAPU, while faculty engage with both the students and the success coach to help support the student academically, all with a spiritually component interwoven. Lastly, students are supported by a wide variety of informational databases, technology resources, including the Tutor.com Writing Center and LMS Moodle 24/7 support.

Recommendations, Future Goals, and Planning for Improvement

Recommendations

1. **Further align and implement PLO 1 more thoroughly into coursework.** It may be beneficial to consider the nature of the religious demographics of the student population (with a number of non-religious or non-Christian students as well as a great diversity of Christian faith denominations). It may be prudent to provide more specificity in the examination of applicable Christian scriptures and include concise and manageable segments of scriptures and psychological principles.

   Recommendation and Improvement Plan: APSY 320 has a significant need for this additional, embedded support. Likewise, it has been identified that there are some current gaps with faith integration readily built in to course shells (APSY 315, APSY 340) and some others would benefit from more salient inclusions (APSY 285, APSY 300). As such, students would benefit from more structure on the use and applicability of Christian worldviews. One example of this is to include relevant verses embedded for consideration and aligned to a specific topic in assignments or discussion forums.

2. **Further align and implement PLO 2 more thoroughly into coursework.** Professional codes of ethics are long, detailed, and contain an abundance of information (APA, ACA, AACC). This can be overwhelming for students, especially if they are introduced to codes in their entirety all at once. By including more specific segments of pertinent ethical codes in lower level classes, students can be more prepared for examining the code(s) in more depth in upper level coursework. Thus, again it may be prudent to consider providing more specificity in the examination of professional ethical codes.

   Recommendation and Improvement Plan: It may be overwhelming for students (as evidenced in previous Annual Learning Assessment proficiency rating) to examine entire professional codes of ethics at one time, especially if they have not been gradually introduced. Thus, by including pertinent elements, such as specific principles and standards embedded into course shells from professional ethical codes (e.g. APA, ACA, AACC) in lower level and mid level courses (not just ethics-specific classes like APSY 475 and APSY 490) but classes like APSY 285, APSY 295, and APSY 315), students can then be familiarized with these elements sooner; later they will be more equipped with more knowledge and skills to complete their advanced signature assignments.

3. **Further align and implement PLO 5 more thoroughly into coursework.** PLO 5 also needs increased support for inclusion into several courses (APSY 300, APSY 320, and APSY 490) in the program. Reviewers discussed how several faculty already do this organically, though more structural support would be beneficial in the curriculum.

   Recommendation and Improvement Plan: The noted deficit with regard to PLO 5 is evident in several courses such as APSY 300, APSY 320, and APSY 490A within the program. While several faculty have the cultural competency necessary to organically include this in their teaching methodologies, more structural support needs to be embedded into course shells, particularly in APSY 490A in order to help prepare students for applying cultural competence in APSY 490B where students are providing service learning within the field.

4. **Increase clarity of PLO 3.** This PLO is long, broad, and difficult to assess. Greater clarity is needed for the PLO and it may be necessary to create two separate PLOs. The identification and use of theoretical frameworks is a distinct skill. The practical skills for effective critical inquiry and information literacy is another.

   Recommendation and Improvement Plan: Since PLO 3 is an ambiguous and unnecessarily broad program learning outcome, increased clarity is needed; it may be necessary to rewrite this PLO in order to better assess proficiency during Annual Learning Assessment.

5. **Develop additional concentrations and special issues topics coursework.**
   Occupational trends highlight continued popularity of the broader mental and behavioral health fields, it may be beneficial for LAPU to consider broadening their degree programs in this field.

   Recommendation and Improvement Plan: Explore is incorporating an applied behavior analysis (ABA) emphasis within the BAAP program, ABA certification, or developing a full ABA degree

program. If a full degree is considered, multiple BAAP courses could potentially be utilized for this degree. In addition, the BAAP program could benefit from more specialized topic options for students. The original plan for the BAAP program was to have three Special Topic courses available for students to choose from. At this juncture, there are still only two special topic courses. Since one Special Topic course is required for students, expanding the repertoire of special topic courses (e.g. trauma-informed care, veterans issues, gerontology, anxiety, etc.) for students to choose from would align with original programming goals and enhance options for students that align with their area of concentration.

6. **Increase faculty support, engagement, and alignment with WSCUC standards.** Dr. Oh and Professor Hunt have been in discussion regarding opportunities for adjunct faculty to receive increased support, development, and strategies for classroom engagement and best practices in the online classroom.

   Recommendation and Improvement Plan: Because of the strong reliance on adjunct faculty in the BAAP program, Professor Hunt and Dr. Oh are considering ways of increasing adjunct faculty support, engagement, and alignment with WSCUC standards to improve strategies for classroom engagement and best practices in the online classroom. Further, in light of current BAAP retention and graduation rates, BAAP program revenue streams, the number of enrolled students, and the stability of the psychology job market from career forecasting resources, exploration of hiring an additional full-time faculty in the BAAP program is worth considering. Moreover, how the use of support staff like student success coaches and offerings of other resources like the Writing Center/Tutor.com are considered to be continued resources to increase engagement and best practices for learning with our student population.

7. **Clarity needed in BAAP mission statement.** External reviewers noted a lack of clarity in the mission statement of the BAAP program.

   Recommendation and Improvement Plan: This could be more clearly written and delineated on LAPU's website, catalogue, and other official materials.

8. **Increased alumni engagement.** External reviewers suggested the inclusion of additional alumni updates, information, and data to boost understanding of post-graduate outcomes.

   Recommendation and Improvement Plan: Involving alumni in orientation for new students, and further as an Advisory Council are two ways to increase alumni engagement. This may consequently increase retention, engagement, and grow the BAAP program even further. Increased record keeping and systematic follow up efforts with alumni could support this improvement piece.

9. **Development of a diversity plan.** Identify key strategies to advance diversity among students and faculty.

   Recommendation and Improvement Plan: Develop a robust diversity plan with measurable and operational progress points and outcomes.

Based on the information gathered and presented within in the BAAP's review in the recommendations and improvement plans, future goals for the program are:

1. Strengthen elements of professional code of ethics and ethical decision making in additional classes. Create a more manageable approach to introduction of ethical considerations in lower division courses.

2. Increase structural support for cultural competency embedded within the course work to aid faculty in better preparing students for work with a diverse population.

3. Increase adjunct faculty support, engagement, and alignment with WSCUC standards to improve strategies for classroom engagement and best practices in the online classroom. Additionally, see how staff such as student success coaches and resources like the Writing Center/Tutor.com can be regularly used to strengthen the resources to better engage our students while incorporating best practices for learning.

4. Reduce current gaps in the faith integration acknowledging the changing student demographics of Christian, diverse Christian Denominations, non-religious and those of various faiths, focusing on the use and applicability of the Christian worldview.

5. Consider incorporating an applied behavior analysis (ABA) emphasis within the BAAP program, ABA certification, or developing a full ABA degree program. If a full degree is considered, multiple BAAP courses could potentially be utilized for this degree.

6. Add more Special Topic courses (veterans/military, gerontology, anxiety, trauma-informed care, substance abuse) to the program aligns with original programming goals and enhances course options for students that align with their area of concentration.

7. Design and implement a diversity plan.

8. Develop a more robust alumni support network and Advisory Council.

Self-Study and External Reviewer Reports: Response to Recommendations

Self-Study Recommendations	Response to Recommendation
Further align and implement PLO 1 more thoroughly into coursework.	Target completion date: End of FY 2021
Further align and implement PLO 2 more thoroughly into coursework	Target completion date: End of FY 2021
Further align and implement PLO 5 more thoroughly into coursework.	Target completion date: End of FY 2021
Increase clarity of PLO 3	Target completion date: End of FY 2021
Develop additional concentrations and special issues topics coursework.	Target completion date: End of FY 2022
Increase faculty support, engagement, and alignment with WSCUC standards	Target completion date: End of FY 2022
External Reviewer Report Recommendations	**Response to Recommendation**
Clarity needed in BAAP mission statement.	Target completion date: End of FY 2021
Increased alumni engagement.	Target completion date: End of FY 2022
Development of a diversity plan.	Target completion date: End of FY 2022

Goals

Goal Recommendations	Response to Recommendation
Strengthen elements of professional code of ethics and ethical decision making in additional classes. Create a more manageable approach to introduction of ethical considerations in lower division courses .	Target completion date: end of FY 2021
Increase structural support for cultural competency embedded within the course work to aid faculty in better preparing students for work with a diverse population.	Target completion date: end of FY 2022

Increase adjunct faculty support, engagement, and alignment with WSCUC standards to improve strategies for classroom engagement and best practices in the online classroom. Figure out strategies to continually use support staff like student success coaches and resources like the Writing Center/Tutor.com to strengthen and increase learning and engagement with students.	Target completion date: end of FY 2022
Reduce current gaps in the faith integration acknowledging the changing student demographics of Christian, diverse Christian Denominations, non-religious and those of various faiths, focusing on the use and applicability of the Christian worldview.	Target completion date: end of FY 2022
Consider incorporating an applied behavior analysis (ABA) emphasis within the BAAP program, ABA certification, or developing a full ABA degree program. If a full degree is considered, multiple BAAP courses could potentially be utilized for this degree.	Target completion date: end of 2022
Adding more Special Topic courses (veterans/military, gerontology, anxiety, trauma-informed care, substance abuse) to the program aligns with original programming goals and enhances course options for students that align with their area of concentration.	Target completion date: end of 2023
Design and implement a diversity plan.	Target completion date: end of 2022
Have a more robust alumni support network and Advisory Council.	Target completion date: end of 2023